MARGARET COMICS

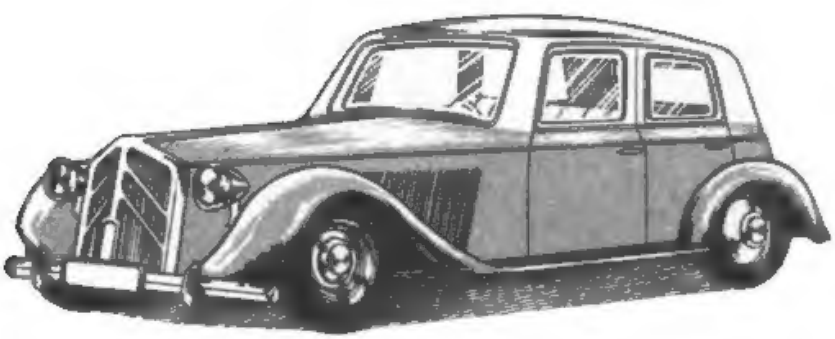
CLAUDINE...!

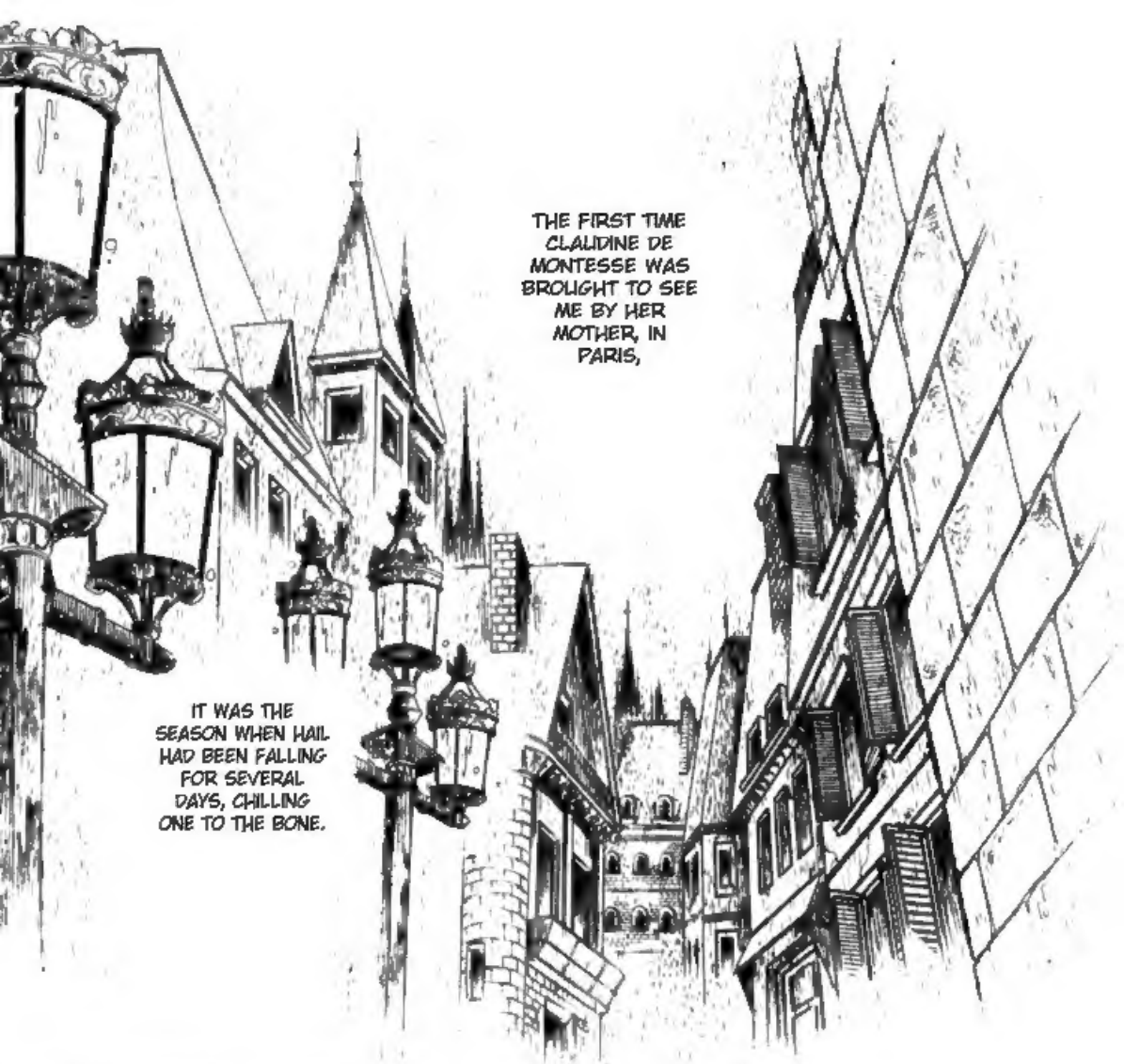
IKEDA RIYOKO

MARGARET COMICS

クローディーヌ…！

池田理代子




THE FIRST TIME CLAUDINE DE MONTESSE WAS BROUGHT TO SEE ME BY HER MOTHER, IN PARIS,
IT WAS THE SEASON WHEN HAIL HAD BEEN FALLING FOR SEVERAL DAYS, CHILLING ONE TO THE BONE.

THIS PLACE IS INCONVENIENT AS AN OFFICE,
BUT IT'S IDEAL FOR WRITING MY MANUSCRIPTS...
YOU MUST HAVE GOTTEN SOAKED ON YOUR WAY HERE.
DRIP
DRIP
I READ YOUR LETTER.
PLEASE COME IN.

PLEASE, COME CLOSER TO THE FIRE.
MAY I TAKE YOUR COATS?
CRACKLE
CRACKLE
FOR THE TIME BEING, PLEASE PUT THEM ON THAT CHAIR.
OH DEAR, THEY'RE ALL WET!
NOW THEN! WHERE IS MY PATIENT...

SHE...
HAD JUST TURNED 10.

CRACKLE
CRACKLE
CRACKLE
CRACKLE
MMHMM...
WELL... IT STARTED WHEN SHE WAS 8.
SHE STARTED SAYING THAT SHE WAS REALLY A BOY...
AND SHE TRIES TO ACT LIKE A BOY, TO BECOME ONE COMPLETELY...
I CAN'T SEEM TO GET THROUGH TO HER, NO MATTER WHAT I SAY.
SHE SAYS THAT SHE IS A GIRL NOW, BUT USED TO BE A BOY.
AND THAT SHE WILL RETURN TO BEING A BOY SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE...
MOTHER, IT'S BECAUSE
I REALLY AM A BOY.
CLAUDINE!
SHE DRESSES LIKE HER OLDER BROTHERS.
YES... SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN MORE ACTIVE THAN MOST BOYS.
HER FRIENDS CALL HER "CLAUDE" AS THOUGH SHE WERE A BOY.

クローディーヌ…！

DO YOU LOVE YOUR FATHER?
YES! OF COURSE...
AS MUCH AS YOU LOVE YOUR MOTHER?
YES!
I SEE...
SO... WHAT DO YOU THINK OF ME? COULD WE BECOME FRIENDS?
CLAUDINE,
OUT OF ALL YOUR SIBLINGS YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE WHO LOOKS LIKE YOUR FATHER, CORRECT?
YES, THAT'S TRUE, DOCTOR.
WELL... YOU SEE...
WELL, IT'S PART OF BEING A DOCTOR.
THAT IS TO SAY... I THINK THE PROBLEM IS WITH YOUR MIND, NOT YOUR BODY.
DOC-TOR,
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO...?

AND SOMEONE LIKE ME IS A VERY INTERESTING CASE FOR YOU.
IN OTHER WORDS, MY MOTHER HAS STARTED TO WORRY THAT SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH MY HEAD.
WELL, WE WON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT UNTIL I'VE SPENT MORE TIME WITH YOU.
DURING THIS FIRST MEETING, I'VE COME TO LIKE YOU BOTH AS A PATIENT...
THE KEY IS WHETHER WE CAN OPEN OUR HEARTS AND HAVE A RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUAL TRUST.
AND AS A PERSON.

YOU SEEM TO BE AN HONEST PERSON.
AND I HAVE NO OBJECTIONS TO BECOMING YOUR PATIENT.
OKAY!
CLAUDINE'S EYES WERE A BRIGHT REDDISH BROWN.
THE WAY THAT HER WELL-FORMED MOUTH, WHICH HAD A STUBBORN SET TO IT, PRONOUNCED VOWELS PRECISELY
INDICATED THAT SHE WAS A PERSON OF EXTRAORDINARY INTELLIGENCE.
THE CONTRAST WITH HER MOTHER, AN ORDINARY, NONDESCRIPT WOMAN, WAS STRIKING.

AH!...
WHOOOOOO
I'VE CAUGHT YOUR UNGRACIOUS UMBRELLA.
HERE YOU ARE, MLLE°.
WELL ...! THANKS!
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: MLLE = ABBREVIATION FOR MADEMOISELLE°
HMM.

A MEMBER OF THE WEALTHY ELITE, HE WAS A FRANK PERSON AS WELL AS A DILETTANTE WITH MANY INTERESTS.
HER FATHER, AUGUSTE DE MONTESSE, TOOK OVER FOR HIS GRANDFATHER IN RUNNING A LARGE PLANTATION.
IS LOCATED AT THE EDGE OF THE ILE DE FRANCE, TO THE EAST OF THE SEINE.
VERNON*, WHERE CLAUDINE WAS BORN,
HE DETESTED BANALITY, YET WHEN IT CAME TO MARRIAGE HE DIDN'T MAKE MUCH OF A FUSS:
HE MARRIED THE GIRL THAT HIS GRANDFATHER CHOSE.

* TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: VERNON IS A REAL CITY IN FRANCE. FOR INFO ON IT, SEE HTTP://GIVERNY.ORG/VERNON/

HE HAD THREE SONS, BUT ALL OF THEM TOOK AFTER THEIR MOTHER. THERE DIDN'T SEEM TO BE ANYTHING THAT STOOD OUT ABOUT THEIR DISPOSITIONS, OTHER THAN THEIR KINDNESS.
AND SO, WHEN CLAUDINE WAS BORN WITH BLONDE HAIR AND STRONG-WILLED LIPS LIKE HER FATHER, AUGUSTE WAS BURSTING WITH JOY.

AND SO, KEEPING WITH THE WAY SHE WAS RAISED, CLAUDINE BECAME EXACTLY LIKE HER FATHER IN PERSONALITY, APPEARANCE, AND BEHAVIOR.
HE WAS HER MODEL AND GUIDE. ONE COULD SAY THAT THERE WAS NOTHING HE LIKED WHICH SHE DID NOT.
SHE LIKED HORSEBACK RIDING, HUNTING WITH HER FATHER, AND EVERY OTHER SPORT AS WELL.

IN HER FATHER'S STUDY, PACKED WITH BOOKS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD,
SHE LISTENED WITH EXCITEMENT AS HE TOLD OF ADVENTURES AND ROMANCES ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD.
SHE WAS FOND OF BAROQUE MUSIC FROM A YOUNG AGE, AND LIKED TO LISTEN TO MOST INSTRUMENTS.
THAT TENDENCY INCREASED AFTER SHE TURNED 8.
TOWARDS HER MOTHER, SHE WAS ALWAYS CHIVALROUS AS A KNIGHT, BUT

SHE GOT ALONG WELL WITH HER SIBLINGS.
HER THREE BROTHERS, ANDREW, EDOUARD, AND THOMAS,
DEEPLY LOVED THEIR CLEVER, BEAUTIFUL SISTER.
AND SO CLAUDINE WAS VERY POPULAR IN HER HOMETOWN, VERNON.
CLAUDINE!
MAMAN* BAKED A CAKE, AND SHE'S WAITING FOR US. I PROMISED!
CLAUDINE, WAIT!

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. MAMAN = FRENCH TERM FOR MOTHER

BUT SIMONE, ANGELIQUE, AND MARABELLE ARE ALL COMING BECAUSE THEY THINK YOU'RE COMING. AND...
DIDN'T YOU SAY IT WAS GIRLS-ONLY?
SHOW YOU OFF?! HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT...!
I DON'T WANT TO GO JUST SO YOU CAN SHOW ME OFF.
I KNOW ALL ABOUT IT.
YOU TOLD ALL THE GIRLS IN THE CLASS THAT WE'RE TOGETHER, DIDN'T YOU?
CLAUDINE!
BUT SHE WAS SO LOOKING FORWARD TO
HAVING CLAUDINE ATTEND HER BIRTHDAY PARTY THIS YEAR.
SO YOU SEE,
I KNOW THAT WHAT I'M ASKING IS UNREASONABLE, MME* MONTESSE.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. MME = MADAME

AND I CAN'T STAND TO SEE HER CRY...
SOB
HICCUP
YOUR BEHAVIOR IS UNACCEPTABLE, CLAUDINE.
ROSEMARIE IS CRYING. GET READY TO GO.
ISN'T THAT RIGHT?
A GENTLEMAN WOULDN'T BREAK A PROMISE TO A GIRL.

HEY... SIMONE, YOU SHOULD GO OVER AND TALK TO HER...
AHH!... YOU SHOULD DO IT FIRST, MARABELLE...
GIGGLE... BUT, Y'KNOW...
HEY, WHAT DO YOU THINK CLAUDINE LIKES TO TALK ABOUT?
SILLY, YOU SHOULD JUST ASK HER THAT.
B-... BUT, THAT'S SO...
DON'T LEAVE YET.
UH... UM, I'LL PLAY MY FLUTE! WILL YOU LISTEN TO IT?
I'M SORRY, CLAUDINE. PLEASE DON'T BE BORED!
SIGH...

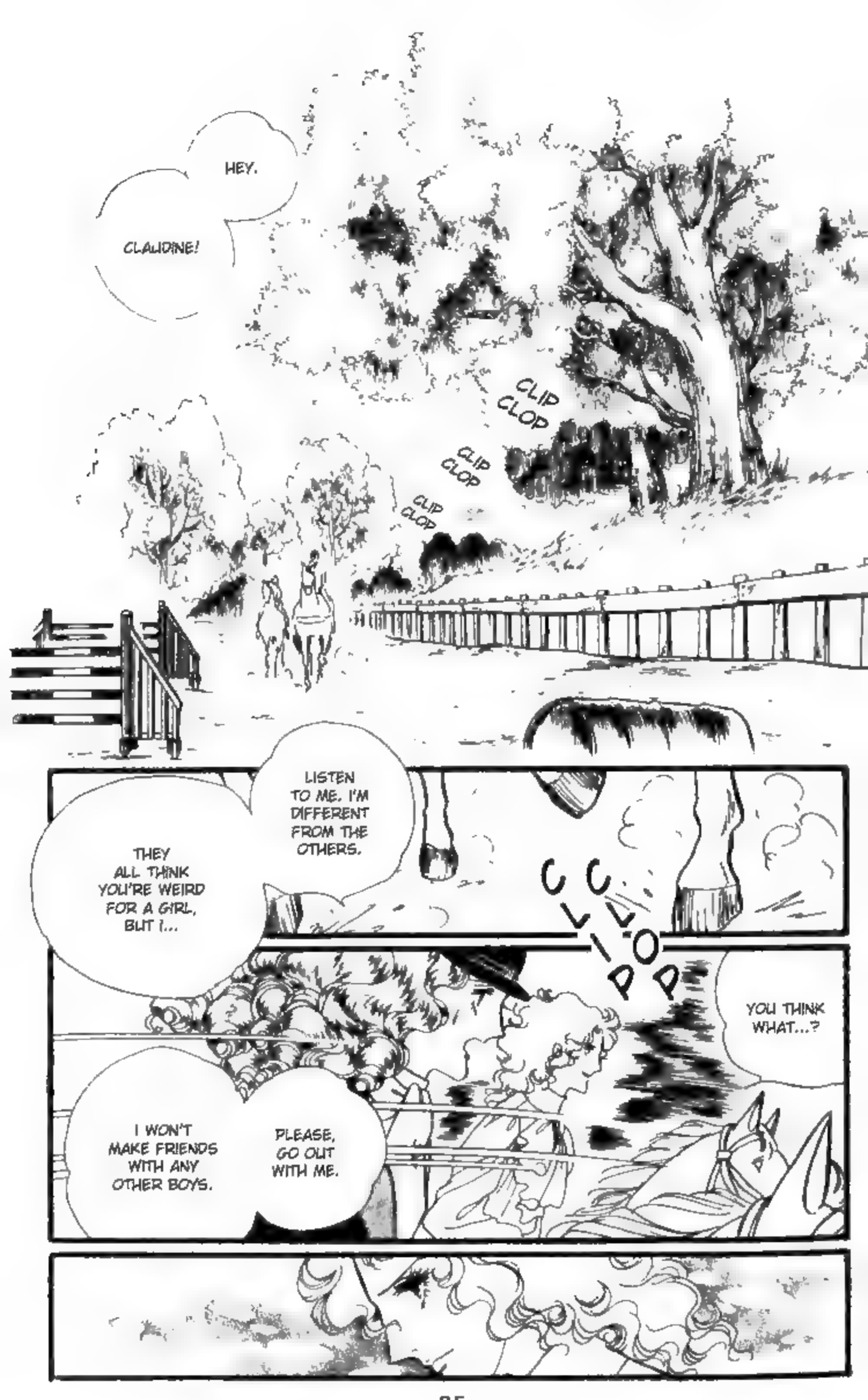
PLEASE WAIT FOR JUST A BIT, CLAUDINE.
M.° LACQUES, YOUR TUTOR, IS HERE TO WISH YOU A HAPPY BIRTHDAY. YOU SHOULD COME GREET HIM.
ROSEMARIE!
OH!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY.
OH, LOUIS-SENSE!! WHAT A SURPRISE!
MY GOODNESS! IT'S A GATHERING OF MADEMOISELLES...
...OH, MY MISTAKE! YOU INVITED YOUR BOYFRIEND TOO.
MY!... HOW BEAU-TIFUL...

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: M. = MONSIEUR

AH!!
SASHI
HOW COULD YOU, SENSEI!! CALLING HER MY BOYFRIEND! THAT'S CLAUDINE DE MONTESSE!
AND AFTER I FINALLY GOT HER TO COME TO MY HOUSE! AH! WAIT, CLAUDINE!!
CLAUDINE! CLAUDINE, WAIT!!
CLAUDINE DE MONTESSE...!?
THEN... SHE IS AUGUSTE'S...

THE BLUEBERRY JELLY IS READY. PLEASE HAVE SOME TOGETHER, IF YOU'D LIKE...
OH? WHERE'S CLAUDINE?
AH! SHE LEFT! SHE LEFT THROUGH THE TERRACE! MAMAAAN!!
CLAU...

WHAP!


HEY.
CLAUDINE!
CLIP CLOP
CLIP CLOP
CLIP CLOP
LISTEN TO ME. I'M DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS.
THEY ALL THINK YOU'RE WEIRD FOR A GIRL, BUT I...
CLOP CLOP
YOU THINK WHAT...?
I WON'T MAKE FRIENDS WITH ANY OTHER BOYS.
PLEASE, GO OUT WITH ME.

SEE, ON THE STEEPLE-CHASE TRACK.
SON...? OH, CLAUDINE?
HEY, M. MONTESSE!
HOW WAS YOUR RIDE? WE CAN SEE YOUR SON FROM HERE.
RATHER BRAVE, HM? AND SHE BROUGHT A PRETTY GIRL WITH HER, TOO...
GOD MADE AN ERROR IN NOT GIVING HER A MALE BODY...
SIGH...
CLAUDINE IS TRULY MY SON, AND HAS GROWN INTO EXACTLY WHAT ENVISIONED HER TO BE.
OH! THANK YOU.
IT'S FROM A M. LACQUES.
M. MONTESSE, YOU HAVE A PHONE CALL.

YOU'D BETTER LEAVE NOW, ROSEMARIE, BEFORE SOMETHING GOES WRONG WITH YOUR HORSE AGAIN, LIKE IT DID LAST TIME.
OH, I GET IT
HEY, CLAUDINE!
TAA-
HERE I GO!

SMACK!

YOU DON'T TAKE ME SERIOUSLY, DO YOU?

ALL RIGHT THEN, I WON'T LET YOU GET AWAY!

GASP...

YEEES!

SMACK

CRASH...!

I'M GOING TO CALL YOUR MAMAN TO COME AND GET YOU BEFORE YOU HURT YOURSELF AGAIN.

I'M SICK OF BABYSITTING YOU.

SIGH

IF YOU TRIED TO GET AWAY BY CROSSING THE ATLANTIC OCEAN,

I WOULD FOLLOW YOU EVEN IF I HAD TO SWIM ACROSS.

HONESTLY...!

YOU'RE REALLY SOMETHING ELSE! SUDDENLY TRYING TO JUMP A HURDLE WHEN YOU'VE NEVER EVEN DONE IT BEFORE!

NO!!

THIS IS MY PROBLEM. IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MAMAN!

DON'T CALL MAMAN!

IF SHE FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS, SHE'D NEVER LET ME OUT OF THE HOUSE AGAIN!

クローディーヌ…！

DON'T CALL MAMAN!!
I'M JUST CHASING AFTER YOU LIKE THIS BECAUSE I WANT TO.
SELFISH..
ANY-WAY..I..
TH-..THAT'S RIGHT..! THIS IS...

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND AT ALL...
I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO REALLY UNDERSTANDS YOU.
A LOT OF GIRLS MAY MAKE A FUSS ABOUT YOU, BUT

I WONDER IF THERE WOULD BE NO ESCAPING IT... THAT I WOULD LOOK AT SOMEONE WITH SUCH SADNESS IN MY EYES...

IF I WERE TO FALL IN LOVE...

WILL I COME TO LOOK AT SOMEONE THAT WAY ONE DAY?

PICK HER UP AT THE STATION?

CATHERINE'S HUSBAND IS IN A BAD WAY, SO MAURA IS COMING TO WORK HERE.

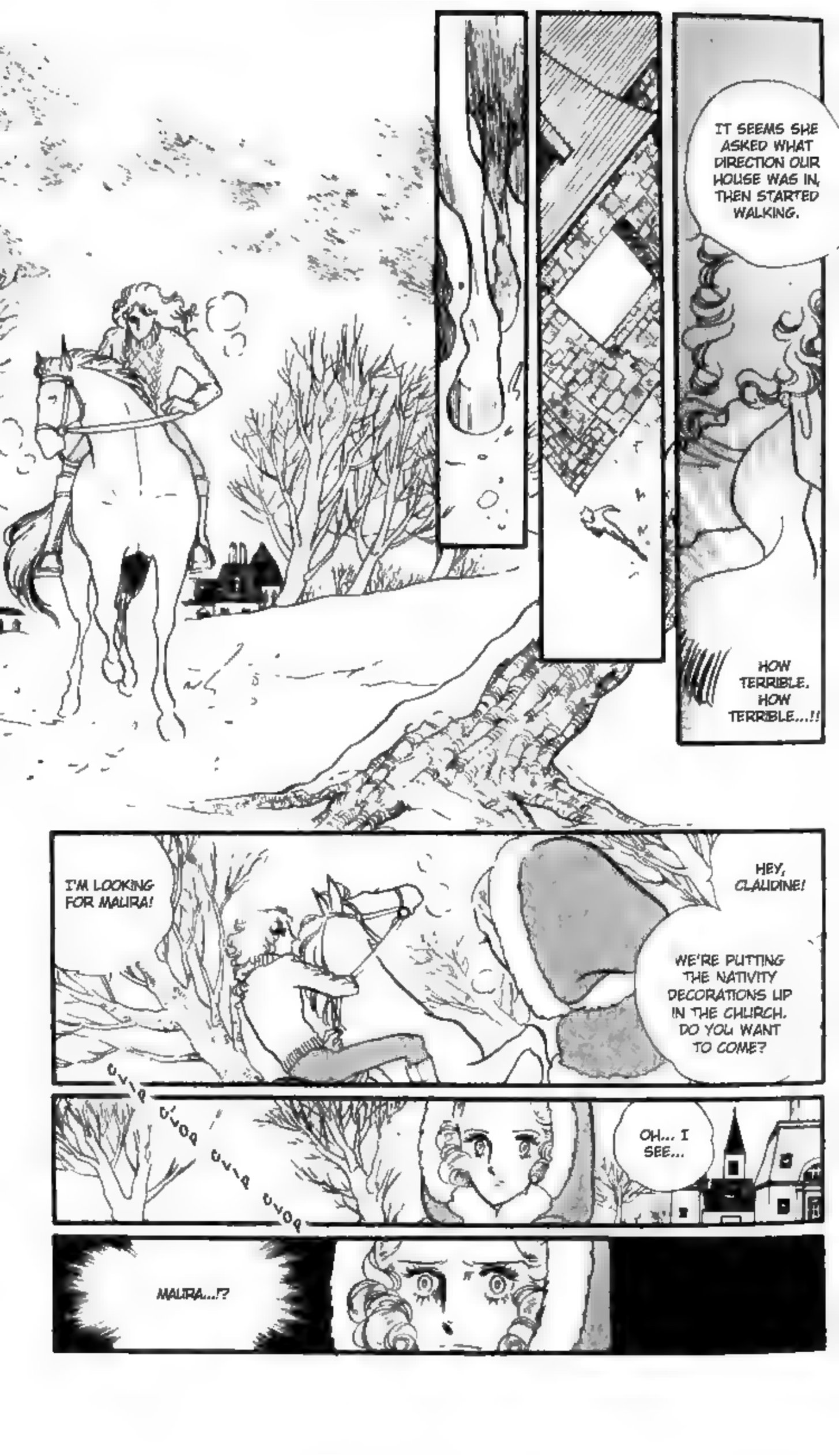
I DID SEND HER A MAP, BUT...

HER NAME IS MAURA. DO YOU REMEMBER HER?

CATHERINE, WHO WORKED HERE AS A MAID UNTIL YOU WERE ABOUT THREE, HAD A BABY GIRL. DO YOU REMEMBER HOLDING HER RIGHT AFTER SHE WAS BORN?

CLAUDINE!
...YZZ IW
DOFC D-FC DOFC D-FC
UGH IT'S COLD OUT!
SHOULD HAVE TAKEN THE BUS.
SHE'S TRAVELING ALONE FROM A FARAWAY PLACE. IF THOMAS OR I WERE FREE WE WOULD PICK HER UP, BUT. .
SHE SENT A PICTURE ONCE. SHE'S A PRETTY GIRL WITH BLACK HAIR.
HOW ABOUT A NICE LONG RIDE TOGETHER?
OUT ALONE?
FATHER!
AH. .
WHINNY

THE ORIENT!?
ARE YOU GOING TO GO AROUND THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE?! TO JAPAN?!
SHE'LL BE FINE. A GIRL LIKE THAT SHOULD BE ALL RIGHT ON HER OWN...
HAHA... TO JAPAN TOO. WE'LL GO THERE TO SEE THE BEAUTIFUL MADEMOISELLES.
O-... OKAY! WILL YOU TAKE ME TO THE RIDING GROUND?
SURE! GET ON.
SHE-... SHE'LL BE FINE. MOTHER SAID SHE GAVE HER A MAP...
CLAUDINE, WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO ON A TRIP TO THE ORIENT WITH ME?
SHE HAS TO GO TO WORK IN PLACE OF HER FATHER, THAT MUST BE HORRIBLE FOR HER...
MAURA... HUH... SHE'LL BE DOING MENIAL WORK, I GUESS.
WHAT WERE YOU DOING, CLAUDINE?
I CALLED THE STATION MANAGER AND HE SAID THAT THERE WAS DEFINITELY A GIRL MATCHING HER DESCRIPTION WHO GOT OFF.
WHAT?! SHE-... SHE ISN'T HERE YET...?


IT SEEMS SHE ASKED WHAT DIRECTION OUR HOUSE WAS IN, THEN STARTED WALKING.
HOW TERRIBLE. HOW TERRIBLE...!!
I'M LOOKING FOR MAURA!
HEY, CLAUDINE!
WE'RE PUTTING THE NATIVITY DECORATIONS UP IN THE CHURCH. DO YOU WANT TO COME?
OH... I SEE...
MAURA...!?

TCH. RIGHT NOW, MOTHER'S...

HAA I HEARD... SHE WAS FOUND... WAS SHE ?!

HAA

SLAM!

YES... MADAME.

CHANGE INTO THE CLOTHES THAT ARE THERE FOR YOU, THEN DRY YOUR HAIR AND COME SIT NEXT TO THE FIRE.

MAURA! MAURA,

AH...

...AAH...!

Y-... YEAH. I NEED TO APOLOGIZE TO YOU, MALIRA.

THE TRUTH IS, THINGS ENDED UP LIKE THIS BECAUSE...

I'M MALIRA.

SHE'S SO TINY ...!

UM... ER, YOU'RE ...

I COULDN'T HAVE ONE FOR A MONTH, BECAUSE I WAS COMING HERE FROM SO FAR AWAY.

I WAS ABLE TO TAKE A REALLY NICE BATH.

IT'S ALL RIGHT!

AH! Y-... YES.

SHOW MALIRA TO THE FIRE, WON'T YOU?

IS THAT YOU, CLAU-DINE?!

FROM WHEN I FELL DOWN.

CRACKLE CRACKLE CRACKLE

THE AMAZING THING IS, I WANDERED IN CIRCLES THE ENTIRE DAY!

I LOST MY WAY.

IT SEEMS I WAS HEADING TOWARDS THE SOUTHERN CLIFFS.

AND BY THE TIME I GOT HERE, I WAS COVERED IN MUD,

CRACKLE CRACKLE
CRACKLE
WELL ...
ZZZZ...

HAA...

HAA

WHO-... WHO IS...

MALI-...

WHY, YOU'RE HERE EARLY, ROSE-MARIE.

GOOD MORNING, MADAME! CLAUDINE!

WHO IS MALIRA ?!

DID YOU NEED ME...?

I'M LOOK-ING FOR MALIRA ...

WELL! SO YOU'RE MALIRA! HO HO HO...

NICE TO MEET YOU, MLLE ROSE-MARIE...?

I SEE! I'M ROSEMARIE. NICE TO MEET YOU.

WELL... THEN! YOU'RE MALIRA!

YOU-.. YOU'RE MALIRA ?!

HO HO HO...

?

?

GOOD MORNING, MADEMOISELLE.
L-... LAST NIGHT I WAS SURE YOU WERE A YOUNG MAN.
OH... PLEASE WAIT OVER THERE WHERE IT'S WARMER, WHILE I LIGHT A FIRE IN THE FIREPLACE.
MORNING, MAURA.
RATTLE
RATTLE
NOW, WHAT KIND OF JAM WOULD YOU LIKE?
MY MOTHER MADE THESE.
RUSTLE
PLEASE WAIT JUST A MOMENT WHILE I GET THE TEA.
SQUEAK
SQUEAK
I LEFT THE BREAD IN THE OVEN...
OH DEAR!
DASH!

クローディーヌ…！

MLLE CLAUDINE, YOU GET WATER OUT OF A TAP HERE! FOR ME, THAT'S...
RATTLE
RATTLE
NO...
AND TALK LIKE AN ADULT, SO I'M IMPRESSED.
YOU DO YOUR JOB WELL,
HM... WAS THERE SOME-THING...?
WELL! I'M NOT A CHILD.
I MAY BE SMALL, BUT I ALREADY HAVE MY PERIOD, AND I CAN DO ANY TYPE OF WORK.
OH... I SEE ...

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN NAMED MLLE ROSEMARIE SUDDENLY BECAME MY FRIEND THIS MORNING.
AND I ALREADY MADE A FRIEND HERE.
OH,
HMPH!
YOU'RE A GOOD MAID, FOR A CHILD!
WE-... ELL! AS YOU CAN SEE, I'M DOING NIGHT WORK, WHICH ONLY ADULTS DO.
I'M KNITTING SOCKS AND GLOVES FOR MY YOUNGER SIBLINGS BACK HOME.

MAURA! IT'S YOU, MAURA!
I THOUGHT THE BOXES WERE MOVING BY THEMSELVES! WOW.
HERE, LET ME TAKE THOSE.
MLLE CLAUDINE!
BUT THEN, MME NORA ...
IT-... IT'S NOT LIKE THAT! MME MONTESSE AND I WERE TAKING THEM HOME TOGETHER!
IT WAS HORRIBLE OF MOTHER TO ASK YOU TO CARRY ALL THESE BY YOURSELF.
BEING NICE IS ALL WELL AND GOOD, BUT IT JUST ENDS UP GIVING YOU MORE PROBLEMS.
...OOPS!
UMPH!
VROOOOM
BUT THIS ISN'T HEAVY AT ALL. I HAD TO CARRY THINGS LIKE THIS ALL THE TIME AT HOME.
SO IT WAS NORA'S FAULT, THAT BRAT...
...OH?

THAT'S ...!!

MOTHER AND FATHER WILL BE SO HAPPY!

MY FIRST TIME GETTING PAID...!

I'M DOING SO WELL!

THEY MUST BE LOOKING FORWARD TO RECEIVING IT.

SKIP

SKIP

ROSEMARIE! ROSEMARIE!

PLEASE TELL ME WHAT'S WRONG. YOU'VE BEEN ACTING LIKE THIS ALL THE TIME, LATELY...

WHICH OF THE THREE MONTESSE BROTHERS HAS MADE YOU CRY LIKE THIS? IS IT THOMAS, THE YOUNGEST?

IS IT EDOUARD, THE SECOND SON, WHO GOES TO ART SCHOOL?

OR IS IT ANDREW, THE ELDEST, WHO'S AT COLLEGE IN PARIS?

I ALREADY HAVE AN IDEA OF WHAT IT IS

AND I THINK I CAN HELP YOU, SO PLEASE TALK TO ME.

GO AWAY! IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK AT ALL!!

STUPID! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND AT ALL, MAMAN!

S.GH
...
THUD...
OH! YOU'RE...
MLLE ROSE-MARIE!
THANK GOODNESS! YOU'RE HERE JUST WHEN I NEED YOU...
UH... UM, COULD YOU TELL ME HOW TO GET TO THE POST OFFICE?
THE POST OFFICE ...?
THANK YOU SO MUCH! I HAD ASKED FOR DIRECTIONS BEFORE, BUT I COMPLETELY FORGOT THEM.
OH, THAT'S IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION. IT'S A LONG WAY AWAY, THROUGH THE GROVE.
RUNNING...

I DON'T THINK SO, MADAME.
SHE MUST BE PLAYING AROUND SOMEWHERE, SINCE SHE JUST GOT PAID FOR THE FIRST TIME.
BUT I DON'T THINK SHE WOULD...
SHE SLIPPED OUT, SAYING SHE HAD TO GO TO THE POST OFFICE OR SOMETHING
I WONDER IF WE SHOULD START LOOKING FOR MAURA. SHE SHOULDN'T BE OUT THIS LATE, WHEN IT'S ALREADY DARK OUT...
SHE MUST HAVE GOTTEN LOST AGAIN.
I'M GOING TO GO LOOK FOR HER.
MAURA!!

OH, THAT WAS BECAUSE I FELL AND ROLLED DOWN A SNOW-COVERED CLIFF.
YOU'RE INJURED! WHAT IN THE WORLD...
Y-... YOUR LEG, IT'S FROSTBITTEN...
COME WITH ME. WE'LL GET THOSE INJURIES TREATED...
MY! YOU HAD US WORRIED...
EHE...
I'M SORRY FOR COMING HOME SO LATE, MADAME.
I TOOK A WRONG TURN SOME-WHERE...
MAURA...
I HAVE A LETTER HERE FROM YOUR MOTHER.
YOU DIDN'T SEND ANY OF YOUR PAY TO HER, DID YOU?
MAURA, DO YOU HAVE A MINUTE?
Y-... YES?
MAURA!

U-... UM...
MADAME... THE TRUTH IS, IT FELL IN THE SNOW WHEN I ROLLED DOWN THAT CLIFF...
CATHERINE WAS EXPECTING THAT MONEY. SHE SAYS THAT SHE'S IN TROUBLE NOW BECAUSE IT DIDN'T COME.
WHAT DID YOU SPEND THE MONEY ON?
I-... I'M SO SORRY ...
UM... I'LL MAKE SURE TO SEND IT PROPERLY FROM NOW ON! I'M SORRY!
BUT MAURA, THAT CLIFF IS IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION FROM THE POST OFFICE.
I DID TELL YOU, MADAME,
THAT SHE MUST HAVE USED THAT MONEY FOR HER OWN AMUSE-MENT.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT AT ALL... WHAT'S GOING THROUGH THE HEADS OF YOUNG GIRLS THESE DAYS...

MLLE CLAUDINE!
OH... I'LL START SOME TEA.
MY MOTHER SHOWED ME HOW TO MAKE REALLY GOOD TEA.
OH-... OH NO! I WAS TAKING A NAP, HOW HORRIBLE OF ME...
SPPFT!
IT'S A MIX OF COCOA, COFFEE, BLACK TEA, AND MILK.
BUT IT REALLY IS GOOD! IT REALLY IS!
THIS MOST LIKELY WAS...

CLAUDINE'S FIRST LOVE...
SIGH...
I WONDER WHY I'M HAVING SO MUCH TROUBLE SLEEPING... I GUESS I'LL HAVE SOME WATER.
HIC
HICCUP
HIC
SURPRISE!
SOB
SOB
SOB
SOB
SOB
HICCUP

MY... MY FATHER...
MY FATHER IS DEAD... SOB... SOB...
MLLE CLAUDINE...
MAURA ...?!
... I THOUGHT I WOULD WAIT UNTIL TONIGHT TO OPEN IT, SO THAT I COULD TAKE MY TIME READING IT... I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO IT...
AH... AH...
HICUP
HICUP
MAURA !!
A LETTER CAME FROM MY FAMILY THIS EVENING...

OH, MAURA! POOR MAURA!
I... KNEW... THAT HE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH LONGER, BUT...
BUT... AH... I... I WASN'T BEING A GOOD DAUGHTER...
MY POOR FATHER ...!!
MY POOR M-... MOTHER ...!!
IT'S OKAY TO CRY.. IT'S OKAY TO CRY...
I'LL HOLD YOU, SO IT'S OKAY.
I'M HERE...
DON'T FORGET THAT... I'M HERE FOR YOU TOO...!
AH

MY DEAR MAURA!

MY DEAR MAURA!

DRAGGED HERE AGAINST HER WILL BY HER MOTHER, WHO WAS WHITE AS A SHEET,
WHEN SHE WAS FIFTEEN YEARS OLD.
CLAUDINE APPEARED AT MY OFFICE FOR THE SECOND TIME
WERE BURNING WITH ANGER.
THE REDDISH-BROWN EYES WHICH HAD CAPTURED MY HEART THE FIRST TIME I MET HER

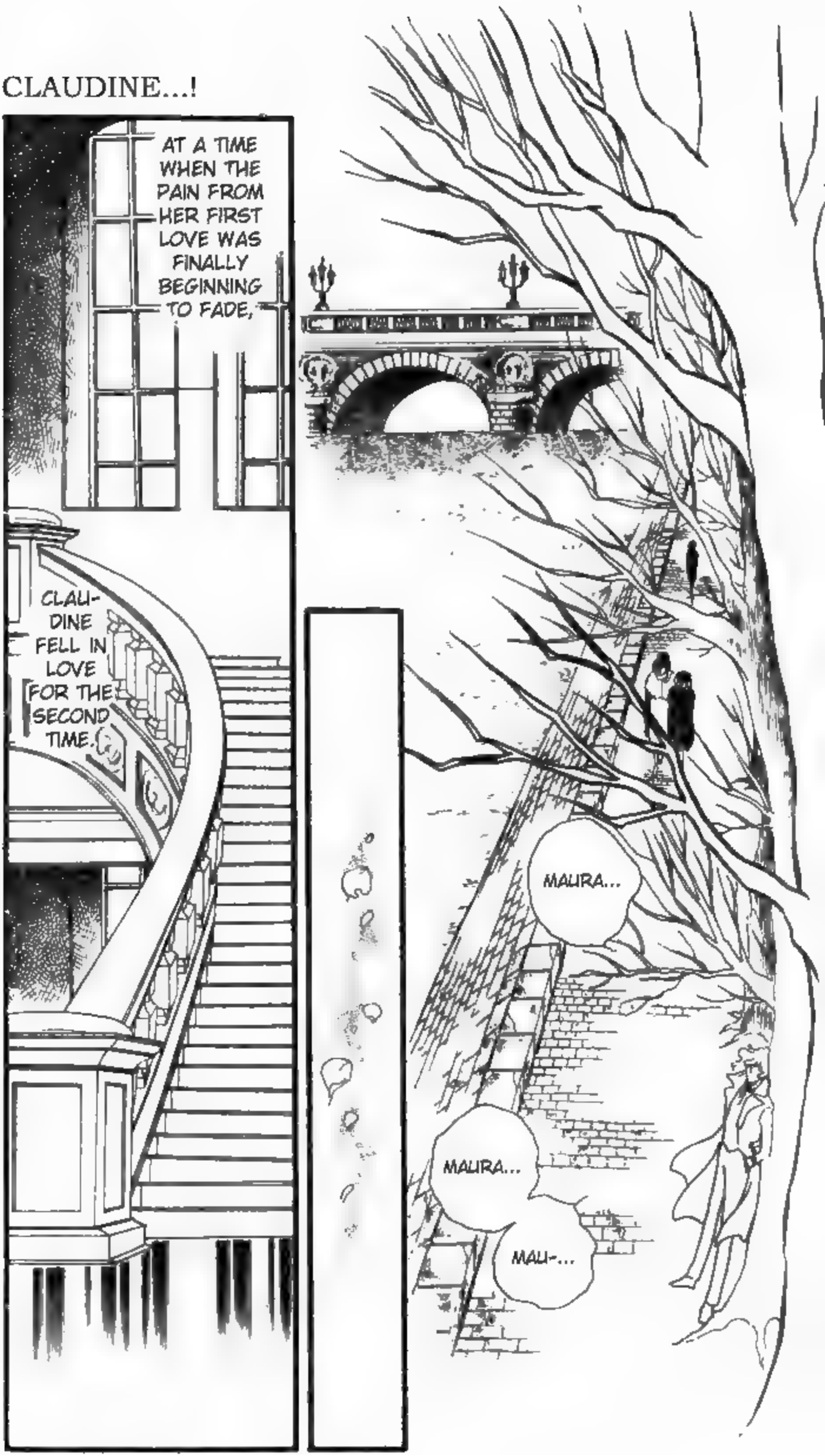
CLAUDINE ...!
CLAUDINE!
I WANT TO WALK.
LET'S MEET AT ANDREW'S PLACE.

CLAUDINE OPENED HER HEART TO ME, TELLING ME EVERYTHING SHE WAS FEELING.
JUST AS SHE HAD PROMISED FIVE YEARS AGO,
MOREOVER, BECAUSE SHE WAS SMART ENOUGH TO QUICKLY FIGURE OUT THE AIM OF MY QUESTIONS,
I REFRAINED FROM USING HYPNOTHERAPY ON HER AT THAT STAGE.
CLAUDINE SAID IT HAD BEEN A MISTAKE TO TELL THE ADULTS THAT SHE WANTED TO MARRY MAURA AFTER SHE FINISHED SCHOOL, THAT IT HAD BEEN FOOLISH OF HER TO BE SO HONEST WITH THEM.
MAURA, THE MAID, HAD BEEN QUICKLY SENT BACK TO THE COUNTRY.

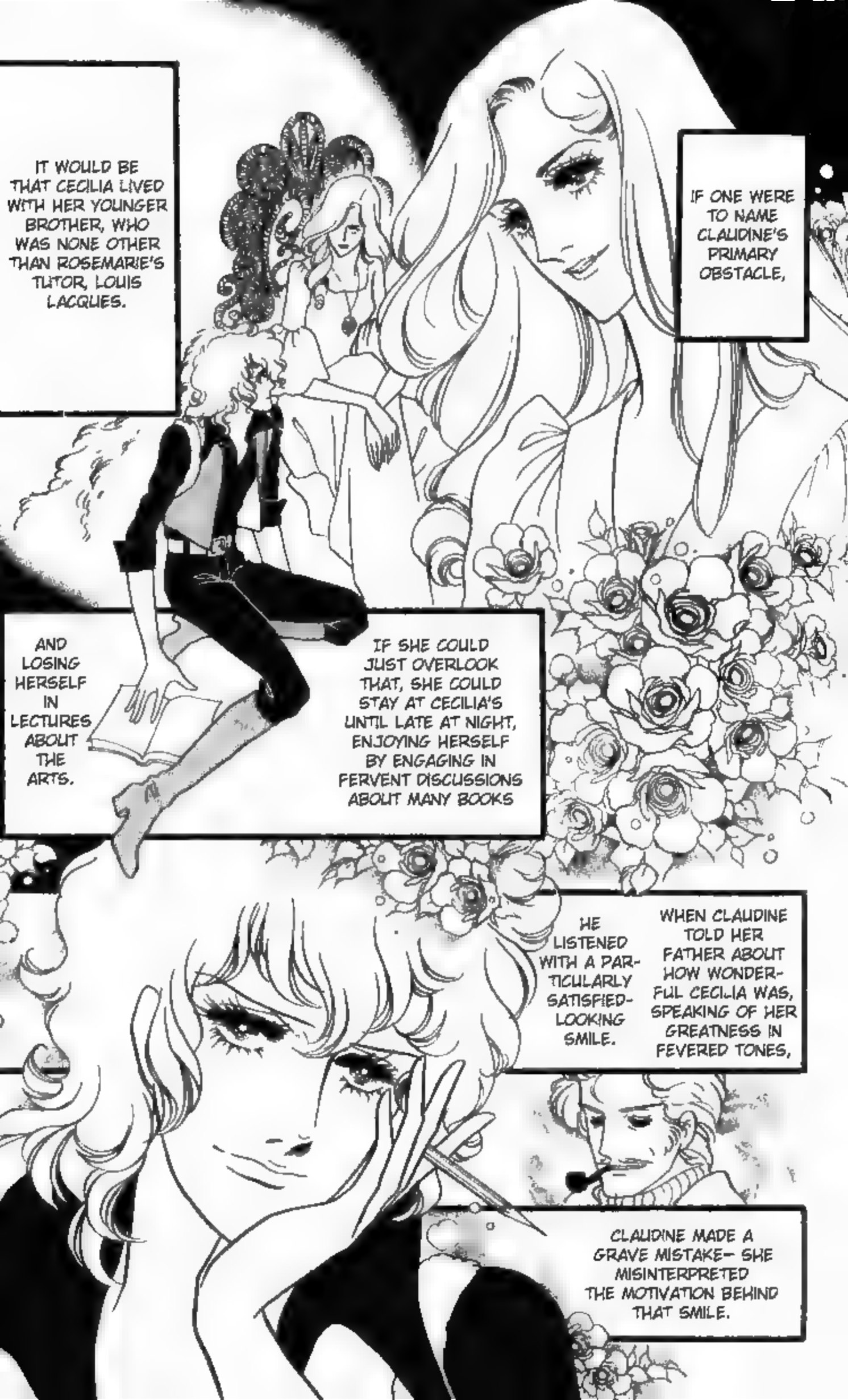
AS A PSYCHOLOGIST, I WAS PERPLEXED
BY THE SHEER FIRMNESS OF THAT STATEMENT.
un
deux
trois
un
deux
trois
un
deux
trois
*ONE TWO THREE

SIRENE!
COME HERE RIGHT NOW.
AH... OKAY!

CLAUDINE...!


AT A TIME WHEN THE PAIN FROM HER FIRST LOVE WAS FINALLY BEGINNING TO FADE,
CLAU-DINE FELL IN LOVE FOR THE SECOND TIME.
MAURA...
MAURA...
MAU-...

SHE WASN'T YOUNG, BUT SHE WAS A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN. HER NAME WAS CECILIA LACQUES.
A LIBRARIAN WORKING IN A HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY.
creak
CLAUDINE'S HEART TURNED TO
THEY HAD IN COMMON A LOVE OF BOOKS.
AFTER THAT, CLAUDINE BEGAN TO PURSUE HER WITH A DEVOTION THAT BORDERED ON WORSHIP.
CECILIA, WITH AN AFFECTIONATE MANNER AND A SMILE THAT CALLED TO MIND THE VIRGIN MARY, STARTED A CONVERSATION WITH CLAUDINE.


IT WOULD BE THAT CECILIA LIVED WITH HER YOUNGER BROTHER, WHO WAS NONE OTHER THAN ROSEMARIE'S TUTOR, LOUIS LACQUES.
IF ONE WERE TO NAME CLAUDINE'S PRIMARY OBSTACLE,
AND LOSING HERSELF IN LECTURES ABOUT THE ARTS.
IF SHE COULD JUST OVERLOOK THAT, SHE COULD STAY AT CECILIA'S UNTIL LATE AT NIGHT, ENJOYING HERSELF BY ENGAGING IN FERVENT DISCUSSIONS ABOUT MANY BOOKS
HE LISTENED WITH A PARTICULARLY SATISFIED-LOOKING SMILE.
WHEN CLAUDINE TOLD HER FATHER ABOUT HOW WONDERFUL CECILIA WAS, SPEAKING OF HER GREATNESS IN FEVERED TONES,
CLAUDINE MADE A GRAVE MISTAKE— SHE MISINTERPRETED THE MOTIVATION BEHIND THAT SMILE.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, CLAUDINE?
DO YOU THINK YOU REALLY HAVE A CHANCE WITH CECILIA?!
SHE'S AN ADULT WOMAN, YOU KNOW!
IT'S ALL JUST PRETEND, ISN'T IT?!
YOU DON'T REALLY THINK SHE'S STILL CELIBATE, THAT THERE ARE NO MEN IN HER LIFE, DO YOU?
SHE-...
SMACK
YOU'RE THE ONE THAT'S GOING TO GET HURT!!
WHY CAN'T YOU SEE THAT?!

CLAUDINE...!
click!
AH...
WELL ...
MY SISTER IS AN ADULT WOMAN,
SO THERE ARE THINGS YOU CAN'T HELP HER WITH.
DON'T WORRY. I'LL GO TO MY ROOM IN A MINUTE.
THUD!
MY SISTER...
ISN'T BACK YET? SHE'S BEEN MAKING YOU WAIT A LOT LATELY.

WHY ARE YOU AVOIDING ME?
CLAUDINE.
surprise
thud!
ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION.
I THINK YOU...
AUGUSTE LOVES ME, AND HIS DAUGHTER LOVES MY SISTER...
THAT MAKES FOR A STYLISH MAP OF RELATIONS, DON'T YOU THINK?
he he
...SO YOU KNOW...
ABOUT MY RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR FATHER...
SLAM!!

WELL...
BUT...
WE JUST STARTED READING, CECILIA.
I WANT TO READ MORE TOMOR-ROW.
I HAVE TO GO OUT TONIGHT, TOO. BUT PLEASE DON'T READ AHEAD WITHOUT ME.
I THINK THAT'S ENOUGH RIMBAUD FOR NOW.
LET'S STOP FOR TONIGHT, CLAUDINE.
...

SLAP!
SAY THAT YOU LOVE ME!!
CLA...
HEY...!
CLAUDINE?!
CECILIA. CECILIA!!
PLEASE, CECILIA! AH...!
I LOVE YOU. I LOVE YOU! P... PLEASE,

I ADORED YOU, AND YOU JUST USED ME TO HIDE THE TRUTH... YOU WANTED PEOPLE TO THINK THAT YOU WERE SPENDING YOUR DAYS OFF WITH ME...
I UNDER-STAND THAT YOU'VE JUST BEEN USING ME!
YES... I UNDER-STAND, ALL RIGHT!
TH-... THAT'S NOT...
WE... WE CAN'T... WE...
WE... WE MUSTN'T...! DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE DOING, CLAUDINE?
YOU DON'T KNOW... HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU... HOW HARD I FELL FOR YOU...
YOU WANT TO SAY IT'S NOT TRUE?!
BUT CLAU-DINE...
YOU'RE A GIRL...

BUT CLAUDINE,
YOU'RE A GIRL.
...YOU'RE... "A GIRL!"...
A GIRL...
A GIRL...
THAT'S RIGHT! THERE WAS A CABIN AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE, NEAR THE FOREST...
HM...
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE RIDDEN THIS LONG, IT'S MORE TIRING THAN I EXPECTED.
MAYBE THERE'S SOMEWHERE COULD..

YOU HAVEN'T BEEN GOING TO CECILIA'S ON SATURDAYS LATELY.
THAT'S RIGHT, I SAW HER WITH A PERSON I NEVER WOULD HAVE IMAGINED, IN THAT CABIN NEAR THE CLIFF. THAT MUST BE WHY...

IT'S-... IT'S THE TRUTH. I SAW IT LAST WEEK.
BUT YOU SHOULD SEE IT FOR YOURSELF. AND SEE FOR YOURSELF WHO SHE'S WITH!
DASH!
PROF. LACQUES!!
PROF. LACQUES!!*

*"PROF." IS SHORT FOR "PROFESSEUR," WHICH IS FRENCH FOR "TEACHER"

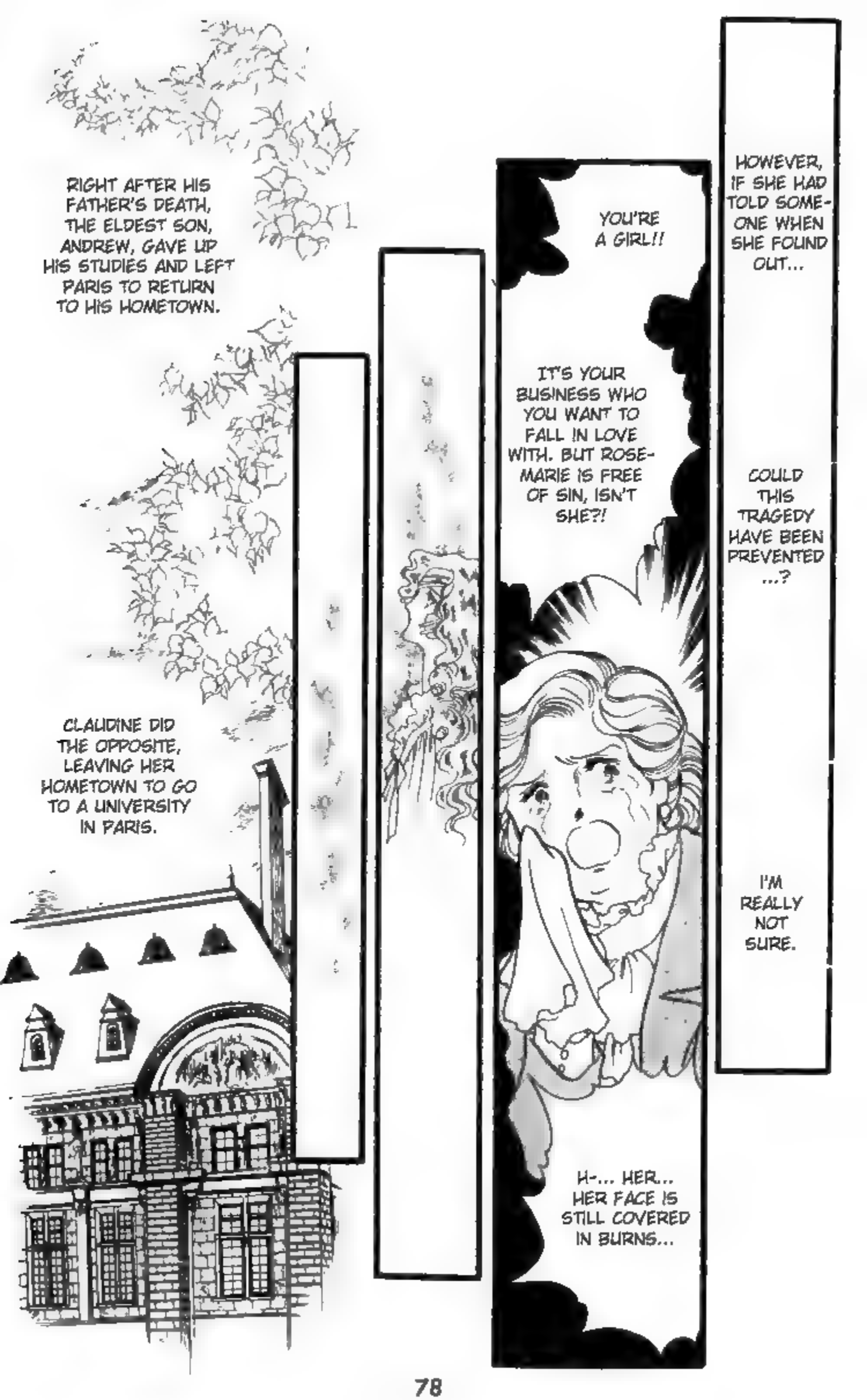
IT'S HORRIBLE! CLAUDINE-...
ROSE-MARIE ?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'LL DO IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO HER... I DIDN'T THINK SHE'D TAKE IT SO BADLY'
. DIDN'T THINK SHE'D FREAK OUT LIKE THAT WHEN SHE FOUND OUT!!
THAT... THAT YOUR SISTER, CECILIA...
WAS SLEEPING WITH CLAUDINE'S FATHER...
OH!! WHAT SHOULD I DO, PROF. LACQUES?
rustle!
AH!
AH!
AH!
THERE'S A FIRE IN THE SOUTHERN GROVE!
FIRE! FIRE!

CLAU-
DINE!!
CLAU-
DINE, WHERE ARE YOU?!!
CRACKLE
CRACKLE
CRACKLE
CLAU-
DINE!!
CLIP
CLOP
CLIP
CLOP
CRASH
CRASH

crash crash crash
LOUIS !!
THAT'S MY FATHER'S ...!!
A HA HA ...
A HA HA HA HA
AHAHAHA! THOSE TWO SEEM TO BE HAVING A GOOD TIME TOGETHER IN THE CABIN. WELL, FOR A COUPLE OF BURNING CORPSES.
LOOK!! THIS IS THE PUNISH-MENT FOR THEIR DECEP-TION!!
MY SISTER AND AUGUSTE BETRAYED ME!!

AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA
MY FATHER IS...
ROAR...
crash
crash
crash
crash
AAHHHHHHHHH...!!
ROAR...
ROAR...

CLAUDINE...!
HAD BETRAYED HER AND HER MOTHER, AND FALLEN IN LOVE WITH A YOUNG BOY.
THAT HER FATHER, WHOM SHE LOVED AND RESPECTED SO MUCH THAT SHE WANTED TO BECOME HIM,
IT WAS...
THERE WAS ONLY ONE THING THAT CLAUDINE EVER KEPT FROM ME.
AND THAT SHE HAD WITNESSED THIS HERSELF WHEN SHE WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD...
CLANG
CLANG
CLANG


RIGHT AFTER HIS FATHER'S DEATH, THE ELDEST SON, ANDREW, GAVE UP HIS STUDIES AND LEFT PARIS TO RETURN TO HIS HOMETOWN.
CLAUDINE DID THE OPPOSITE, LEAVING HER HOMETOWN TO GO TO A UNIVERSITY IN PARIS.
YOU'RE A GIRL!!
IT'S YOUR BUSINESS WHO YOU WANT TO FALL IN LOVE WITH. BUT ROSE-MARIE IS FREE OF SIN, ISN'T SHE?!
H-... HER... HER FACE IS STILL COVERED IN BURNS...
HOWEVER, IF SHE HAD TOLD SOME-ONE WHEN SHE FOUND OUT...
COULD THIS TRAGEDY HAVE BEEN PREVENTED ...?
I'M REALLY NOT SURE.

SHE EARNED MANY AWARDS,
AT THE UNIVERSITY, CLAUDINE'S INTELLIGENCE AND CHARM MADE HER VERY POPULAR.
PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDENT COUNCIL, AND GAVE ELOQUENT SPEECHES.
THE MEN'S SOCIAL CLUB EVEN MADE AN EXCEPTION FOR HER TO BECOME A MEMBER.
IT WAS AT A PARTY HELD BY THAT CLUB
THAT CLAUDINE MET SIRENE BERGE, A WOMAN ONE COULD SAY SHE WAS DESTINED TO MEET.

IT'S CLAU-DINE!
IT'S CLAU-DINE!
I'D LIKE US TO BECOME FRIENDS, CLAUDINE.
U-... UM,
YES.
I FEEL LIKE WE'VE MET SOME-WHERE BEFORE.

CLAUDINE...!

CLAUDINE, WAIT!
AREN'T WE FRIENDS, CLAUDINE?
WHY DID YOU LEAVE SO SUDDENLY?! I THOUGHT WE WERE ALL GOING TO SING TOGETHER.
NO REA-SON, REALLY ..
I JUST DON'T CARE MUCH FOR NOISY PLACES.
CLAU-DINE!
CLAU-DINE!
CLAU-DINE!!
CLAU-DINE!
BUT IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN AVOIDING ME LATELY...
I'M TELLING YOU, NOTHING'S WRONG!!

CLAU-
DINE!!
I
DIDN'T...
WANT...
TO FALL
IN LOVE
AGAIN...
AH

grab!
I NEVER WANTED TO FALL IN LOVE AGAIN.
CLAU-DINE... AH...
YOU'RE A WOMAN... AND YET, I...
I DIDN'T WANT THINGS... TO END UP LIKE THIS AGAIN.

WE ARE SO RELIEVED...
THAT OUR SIRENE HAS BEEN SO LUCKY AS TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH SUCH A WONDERFUL PERSON.
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, DEAR?
YES, THAT'S VERY TRUE. I'M ALWAYS TELLING HER TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH GOOD PEOPLE.
SHE DID EVEN BETTER THAN I EXPECTED, HAVING THE SMARTEST WOMAN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PARIS AS HER BEST FRIEND.
PAPA!

MAKE SURE TO LEARN A LOT FROM MLLE MONTESSE, AND FOLLOW HER EXAMPLE.
IT WOULD BE WONDERFUL IF YOU COULD LEARN ABOUT A VARIETY OF THINGS.
THEN IT'S REALLY ALL RIGHT WITH YOU IF CLAUDINE AND I BECOME ROOMMATES?
YES...!
THANK YOU... FOR RUNNING AWAY WITH ME, CLAUDINE!
SO...
WE CAN LIVE TO-GETHER NOW.
YOU'RE SUCH A NICE YOUNG WOMAN. SIRENE IS SO LUCKY!
YOU'RE SO DIFFERENT FROM HER, HAVING GROWN UP IN A GOOD FAMILY.
BUT WE MAY HAVE TO FACE DIVINE PUNISHMENT.
IF I CAN BE WITH YOU...
I WON'T BE AFRAID ...
I'LL HAVE NO REGRETS...
BELONGS TO YOU...
ALL THAT I AM...
EVERY-THING...

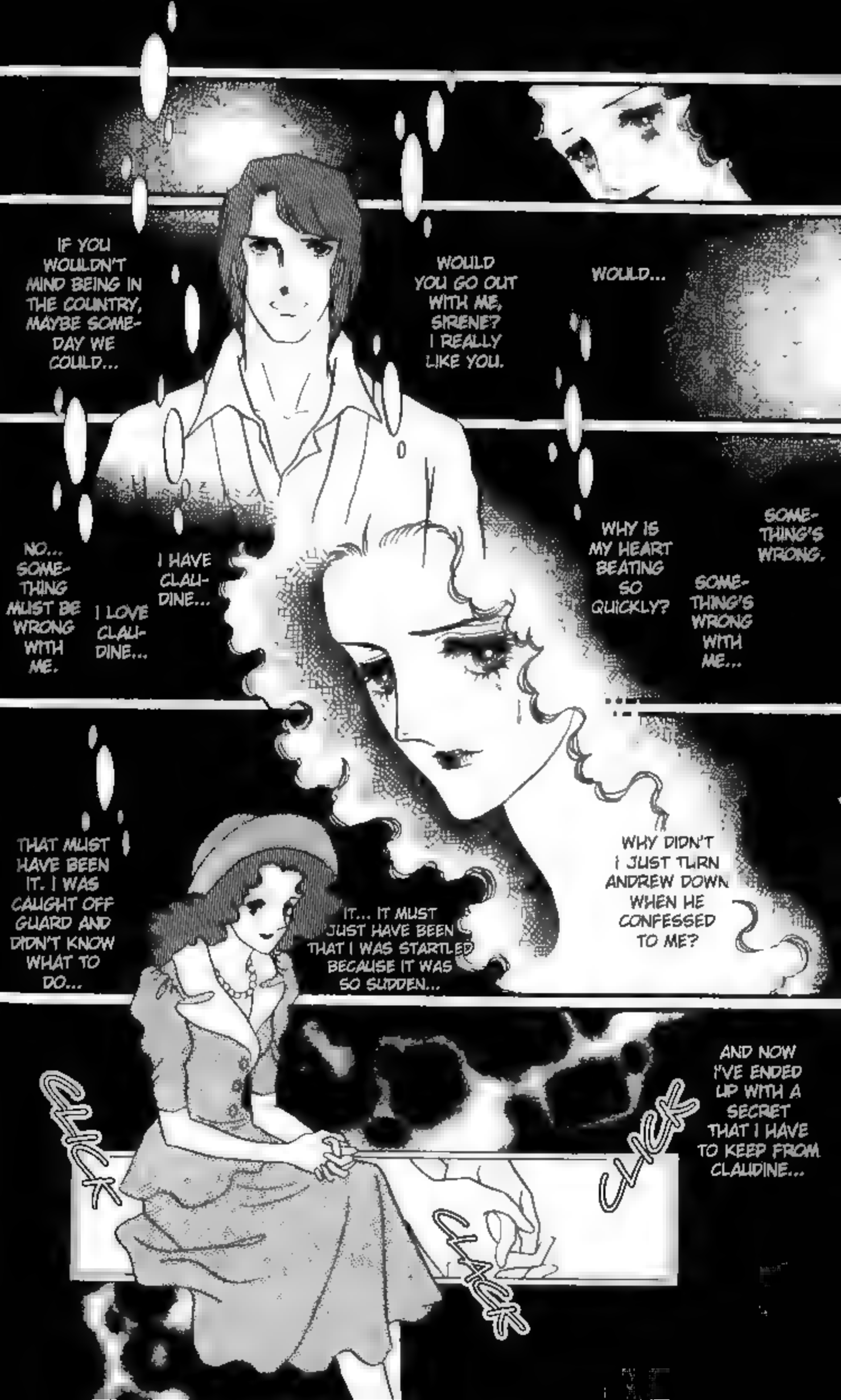
BUT, LIKE A FLOWER WAITING FOR THE RAIN, THE LOVE THAT THEY HAD TRIED TO HIDE AWAY FINALLY GUSHED OUT, SPARKLING BRILLIANTLY.
THEY LIVED TOGETHER UNDER THE PRETENSE OF BEING FRIENDS, DECEIVING THE WORLD,
THEY HELD HANDS WITHOUT FEAR.
CLAUDINE TRULY LOVED SIRENE WITH ALL OF HER BEING.
I THINK THAT THE LOVE SHE FELT WAS TRUE LOVE, THE KIND THAT GOES BEYOND PRECONCEIVED IDEAS OF WHAT LOVE IS AND TRULY TOUCHES THE HEART.
CLAUDINE BROUGHT SIRENE TO THE OPERA, TO PLAYS, AND TO CONCERTS AT EVERY POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITY, IN ORDER TO FURTHER SIRENE'S EDUCATION.
CLAUDINE SPOKE FERVENTLY TO HER LOVE OF ALL THE BEAUTY AND WISDOM IN THE WORLD.

LOOKING AT HER AS MY PATIENT, I SEE HOW DEEP HER LOVE WAS.
NO MAN COULD LOVE A WOMAN AS DEEPLY AS CLAUDINE DID.
I ASSERT THAT
I THINK THAT THE COMPENSATION SHE RECIEVED IN RETURN, ON A WHIM OF GOD, WAS TOO LARGE.
THE TRAGEDY
WAS FAST APPROACH-ING...

KNOCK KNOCK
IS THAT YOU, CLAUDINE?! YOU'RE BACK EARLY!
DID YOU FIND THE BOOK YOU WERE LOOKING FO-..
click
AHHHH!
AH...
PLEASE EXCUSE ME... I THOUGHT THIS WAS MY SISTER CLAUDINE'S ROOM...
YES... YES, IT IS. UM...
AH... AH! IS THAT SO.
MY SISTER IS PLANNING TO GET A MASTER'S DEGREE... SO I CAME HERE TO SPEAK WITH HER ABOUT THE FUTURE...
MY NAME IS SIRENE BERGE.
I'M CLAUDINE'S ROOM-MATE.
I SEE... NICE TO MEET YOU.
I... I'M ANDREW, CLAUDINE'S OLDEST BROTHER.
AH... PLEASE EXCUSE ME. UM...

CLAUDINE...!

BUT BEFORE THAT, SHE VISITED HER HOMETOWN, VERNON, ACCOMPANIED BY SIRENE.
CLAUDINE PLANNED TO TAKE THE PROFESSOR'S QUALIFICATION EXAM.
HAVING MET THE QUALIFI-CATIONS FOR A MASTER'S DEGREE,
SO WHAT DID YOU THINK OF VERNON?
CLACK
CLICK
CLICK
CLICK
CLACK
WHAT?!
A-... AH. I'M SORRY. UH... UM, WHAT WERE YOU SAYING?
SI-RENE ...?
NO! NOTHING'S WRONG.
VI-... VISITING THE COUNTRY-SIDE WAS JUST SO FUN, MY HEAD HAS BEEN IN THE CLOUDS A BIT.
...IS SOMETHING WRONG...? YOU'VE BEEN ACTING STRANGELY EVER SINCE WE LEFT VERNON.
CLACK
CLICK

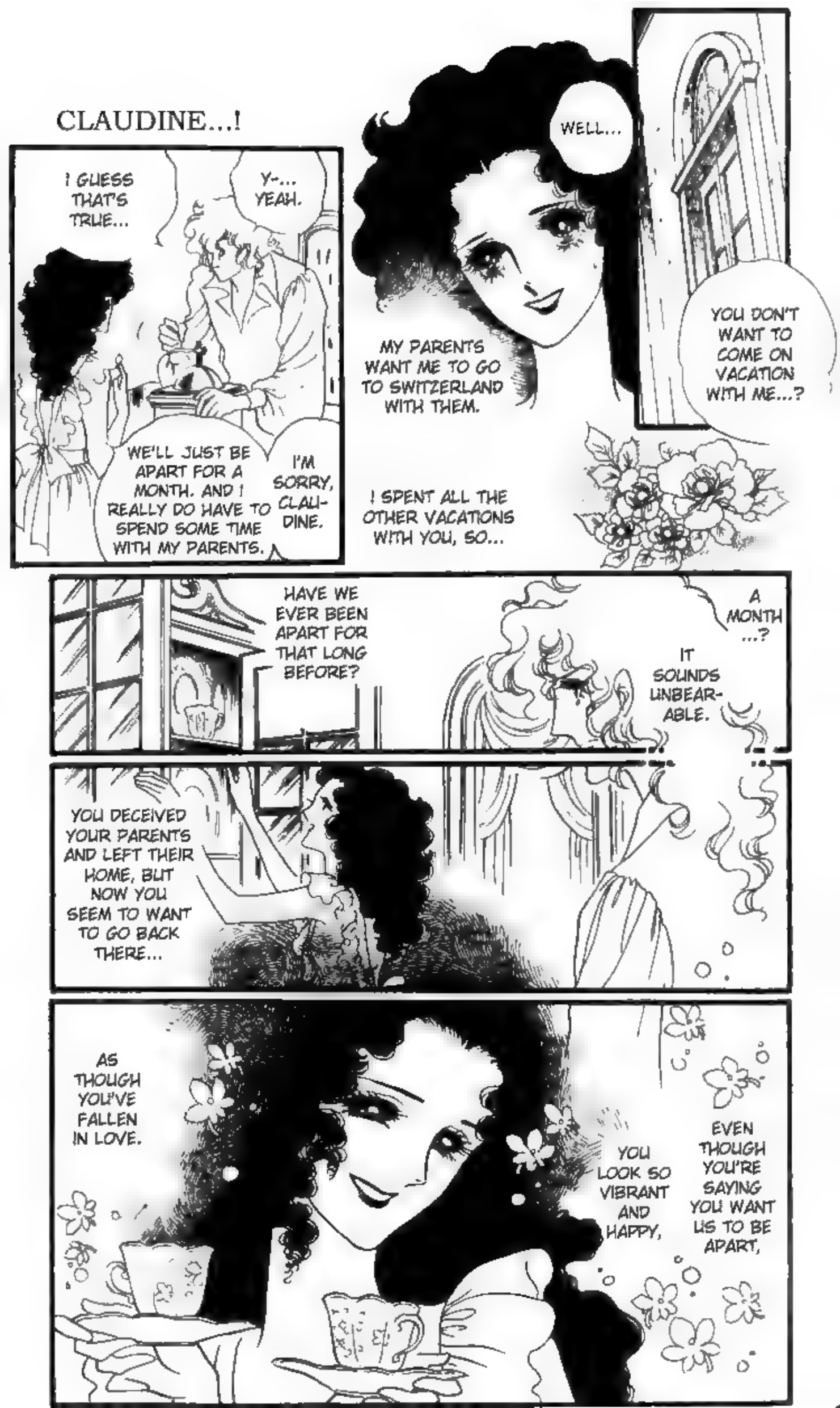

IF YOU WOULDN'T MIND BEING IN THE COUNTRY, MAYBE SOME-DAY WE COULD...
WOULD YOU GO OUT WITH ME, SIRENE? I REALLY LIKE YOU.
WOULD...
NO... SOME-THING MUST BE WRONG WITH ME.
I LOVE CLAU-DINE...
I HAVE CLAU-DINE...
WHY IS MY HEART BEATING SO QUICKLY?
SOME-THING'S WRONG WITH ME...
SOME-THING'S WRONG.
THAT MUST HAVE BEEN IT. I WAS CAUGHT OFF GUARD AND DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO...
IT... IT MUST JUST HAVE BEEN THAT I WAS STARTLED BECAUSE IT WAS SO SUDDEN...
WHY DIDN'T I JUST TURN ANDREW DOWN WHEN HE CONFESSED TO ME?
CLICK
CLACK
AND NOW I'VE ENDED UP WITH A SECRET THAT I HAVE TO KEEP FROM CLAUDINE...

CLAUDINE...!
YES... YES, THAT'S RIGHT...
YES... WELL THEN...
YES, M. ANDREW.
I'M HOME, SIRENE!
ARE YOU HERE? I FOUND A GOOD BOO-...
!!
OH, DID MY BROTHER CALL?
AH...
I-... I'M SORRY! I DIDN'T THINK YOU WERE HERE, SO I HUNG UP...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. I'LL JUST CALL HIM BACK LATER.
SLAM!

SO, WHEN THAT HAPPENS, A PROFESSOR SHOULD SAY...
ho ho ho!
RO-... SE- MARIE !!
WELL! YOU MAKE IT SOUND LIKE I'M JINXED!
ho ho ho.
YOU LOOK PRETTY SURPRISED. IS IT THAT UNEXPECTED?
THAT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU SHOULD SAY TO A CHILDHOOD FRIEND, YOU KNOW.
...IT SEEMS LIKE BAD THINGS HAPPEN WHENEVER YOU APPEAR.

I'LL BE LIVING IN PARIS FROM NOW ON. I RUN A LITTLE SHOP HERE.
IT SEEMS I'M IN THE WAY, SO I'LL JUST GET IN TOUCH WITH YOU LATER.
SEE YOU... CLAUDINE.
THE POOR THING... HER FACE WAS BURNED IN A FIRE...
AH...
I DON'T... I DON'T REMEMBER TELLING YOU ABOUT THAT.
B-... BACK... WHEN YOU TOOK ME TO THE COUNTRYSIDE...
UM...

I WONDER WHEN IT CHANGED?
SOMETHING IS... DIFFERENT FROM BEFORE.
SHE'S BEEN ACTING STRANGELY LATELY.
SHE'S KEEPING SOMETHING FROM ME...
WHY... SHE SEEMED TO BE CONTENT BEFORE.
SHE'S BEEN CRYING ...?!
SOME-THING IS CHANGING...
YANK!


CLAUDINE...!
I GUESS THAT'S TRUE...
Y-... YEAH.
WE'LL JUST BE APART FOR A MONTH. AND I REALLY DO HAVE TO SPEND SOME TIME WITH MY PARENTS.
I'M SORRY, CLAUDINE.
WELL...
MY PARENTS WANT ME TO GO TO SWITZERLAND WITH THEM.
YOU DON'T WANT TO COME ON VACATION WITH ME...?
I SPENT ALL THE OTHER VACATIONS WITH YOU, SO...
HAVE WE EVER BEEN APART FOR THAT LONG BEFORE?
A MONTH ...?
IT SOUNDS UNBEAR-ABLE.
YOU DECEIVED YOUR PARENTS AND LEFT THEIR HOME, BUT NOW YOU SEEM TO WANT TO GO BACK THERE...
AS THOUGH YOU'VE FALLEN IN LOVE.
YOU LOOK SO VIBRANT AND HAPPY,
EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE SAYING YOU WANT US TO BE APART,

...LOVE...?!
I SHOULDN'T... SUSPECT HER LIKE TH.S.
BUT CLAU-DINE,
YOU'RE A GIRL.
GOOD FRIENDS...
GOOD FRIENDS.
"I WANT US TO JUST BE GOOD FRIENDS AGAIN."
SIRENE'S ANSWER REMAINED THE SAME.
AFTER THE VACA-TION ENDED...
SIRENE DIDN'T RETURN TO CLAUDINE...
NO MATTER HOW MUCH CLAUDINE BEGGED AND PLEADED,

I'M GLAD THAT YOU STOPPED BY MY STORE.
I DON'T CARE IF IT WAS JUST BY ACCI-DENT.
WE CAN'T GO BACK TO BEING JUST FRIENDS!!
YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE-
I LOVED YOU!!
I LOVED YOU, SIRENE, WITH BOTH MY HEART... AND MY BODY...!!
I DIDN'T JUST WANT TO BE FRIENDS!
I LOVED YOU!

WITH A FACE LIKE THIS... ! CAN'T GET MARRIED.
MY PARENTS WERE WORRIED ABOUT ME, SO THEY GAVE ME THIS STORE.
I COULDN'T LOVE ANY MAN BUT YOU ANYWAY.
I DON'T HAVE ANY REGRETS.
DON'T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT.
YOU'RE NOT A WOMAN. YOU'RE A MAN, JUST LIKE ANY OTHER.
...YOU UNDER-STAND, DON'T YOU?
...MAN ...?
THAT'S RIGHT. I UNDER-STAND
THAT YOU WERE GIVEN A FEMALE BODY BY ACCIDENT.
YOU'RE A MAN. WELL, AT LEAST I BELIEVE THAT, ANYWAY.

CLAUDINE...!

... WHAT ?!
clink...
OH, THAT'S RIGHT. IS ANDREW STAYING WITH YOU AGAIN?
HE WAS GOING TO STAY FOR QUITE A WHILE THIS TIME, RIGHT?
CLATTER!
WELL, I'LL BE! CALL YOUR FAMILY IN VERNON AND ASK ABOUT IT.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WHAT...?
YOU DIDN'T KNOW THAT HE'S BEEN IN PARIS FOR A WHILE NOW?
THAT'S STRANGE. WHEN I RAN INTO HIM BEFORE, I WAS SURE HE SAID HE WAS GOING TO MEET YOU...
WELL, I GUESS HE MUST BE STAYING IN A HOTEL, THEN...

BANG!
HOTEL
AH ..
I'M SORRY...
I'M SORRY, CLAUDINE!
I'M SORRY, CLAUDINE!!

SHE TOLD ME ABOUT YOUR RELATION-SHIP.
YOU'RE A WOMAN, SO...
AND I'M WILLING TO FORGIVE YOU.
SIRENE AND I...
ARE PLANNING TO GET MARRIED.
I WON'T FORGIVE HER!
UNTIL SHE PLUNGES INTO THE DEPTHS OF HELL...
SHE CHEATED ON ME...!!
Sob
Sob
Sob Sob
Sob
Sob
Sob

HER VOICE WAS HOARSE, AND VERY QUIET.
SHORTLY BEFORE CHRISTMAS, I HAD A CALL FROM CLAUDINE.
TELL ME, DOCTOR...
SO WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR A LONG TIME?
WAS I AN INTERESTING CASE FOR YOU?
HAHA... I GUESS SO. WE FIRST MET 15 YEARS AGO, SO I GUESS THAT'S TRUE.
I DON'T THINK IT'S BECAUSE OF A FATHER COMPLEX, THOUGH.
TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I HAVEN'T DEALT WITH YOU AS A PATIENT AT ALL.
WELL, YOU'RE REALLY PUTTING ME ON THE SPOT!
YOU ARE A MAN.
...I THINK SO TOO.
I AM A MAN.
IT'S NOT JUST THAT I WANTED TO BECOME LIKE MY FATHER, WHOM I LOVED AND RESPECTED.
I REALLY AM A MAN.
AND IT'S NOT THAT I WANTED TO BE LIKE THE YOUNG BOY THAT HE LOVED.
YOUR BODY JUST ISN'T QUITE RIGHT.

HAHA... SO THAT'S IT...
THAT'S IT, ISN'T IT? I'M AN IMPERFECT MAN.
THAT'S... RIGHT...
I'M AN IMPERFECT MAN... SO THAT'S IT...
NOT QUITE RIGHT...
SO THAT'S WHAT IT IS...!
HA... HAHA...
CLAUDINE, ARE YOU STILL LISTENING?
CLAUDINE.
BUT I THINK YOU'RE VERY MASCULINE, AND A BETTER MAN THAN ANYONE.
YOU WERE GIVEN A FEMALE BODY BY ACCIDENT,
click
THANKS... DOCTOR...
CLAUDINE ?!

MY DEAR SIRENE, THE EMBODIMENT OF LOVE AND BEAUTY,
I AM PUTTING ALL MY LOVE INTO THIS LETTER AND MAKING A FINAL GAMBLE.
IF YOU CHOOSE ME, PLEASE COME SEE ME ON CHRISTMAS EVE IN THIS ROOM WHERE WE LIVED TOGETHER.
PLEASE CHOOSE... WHETHER YOU WANT ME OR MY BROTHER ANDREW.
I WOULD LIKE TO REPEAT SOMETHING THAT YOU SHOULDN'T FEEL OBLIGED
BUT IN REGARDS TO YOUR CHOICE,
NAMELY, THAT MY LOVE FOR YOU IS NEVERENDING. PLEASE BELIEVE THAT...
TO FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR...

BANG

THE SNOW WOULDN'T STOP FALLING.

IT CLEANSED EVERYTHING AND PUT THE GROUND TO SLEEP.

CLAUDINE, WITH HER "IMPERFECT BODY," STILL LIVED LIFE TO THE FULLEST AND DARED TO LOVE ONE WOMAN...

THEN FELL INTO DESPAIR.

I DON'T KNOW IF IT WAS THAT DESPAIR THAT LED HER TO TAKE HER OWN LIFE.

AS A PSYCHIATRIST, I DON'T MIND GIVING HER THE LABEL OF "TRANSSEXUAL."

HER BRIGHT REDDISH-BROWN EYES ARE THE ONLY ASPECT OF HER THAT REMAINS IN MY HEART.
NOW THAT HER SOUL HAS GONE TO ITS ETERNAL RESTING PLACE,
ONCE AGAIN, I ASSERT THAT
EVEN A TRUE MAN COULD NOT LOVE A WOMAN AS DEEPLY AS SHE DID.
AT ANY RATE, I WAS UNABLE TO SAVE A WONDERFUL FRIEND FROM A TRAGIC END.
THIS ALL TOOK PLACE MANY YEARS AGO...
BUT...
thud

《the end》

Lililicious~may its fragrance encompass you
#lililicious@ira.rizon.net